



# Aethiopica 5 (2002)

International Journal of Ethiopian and  
Eritrean Studies

---

BAIRU TAFLA

**Article**

*The Impact of Dogali on the International Policy of the Central European Powers*

Aethiopica 5 (2002), 112–124

ISSN: 1430–1938

---

Published by

Universität Hamburg

Asien Afrika Institut, Abteilung Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

Hiob Ludolf Zentrum für Äthiopistik

## The Impact of Dogali on the International Policy of the Central European Powers

BAIRU TAFLA

The centennial celebration of the victory of Dogali in Ethiopia in February 1987 revived the history and memory of a battle which had somehow slipped into oblivion as quickly as it was fought. In contrast to the first hundred years in which historians dismissed the event with a couple of sentences, the name “Dogali” was widely reported in the European press in 1887, but it soon submerged under the generic names of “Massawa” and “Italian Colonial Possessions at the Red Sea Coast” in the archives of at least the Central European states. In the published records, too, it was tragically misrepresented as a massacre, an ambush and an illegitimate unilateral attack by “a rebel chief”.

Unlike ‘Adwa and Mayčäw, there was, at least to my knowledge, no institution, no square and no street in Ethiopia named after this victory until the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Admittedly, the battle was too small and too fleeting in relation to the magnitude of the colonial confrontations of the time. But it was no doubt symbolically historic so as not to be forgotten by at least the victor. “The battle of Dogali”, acknowledges a historian of our time, “was undoubtedly one of the most important events in the history of Ethiopia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century”.<sup>1</sup> “Dogali was”, states another, “the bitter pill which the European colonial powers in general and Italy in particular had to swallow”.<sup>2</sup>

The second century of Dogali began not only with a special monograph<sup>3</sup> comprising a number of academic essays which assess various aspects of the battle, but also with an historical novel in Amharic.<sup>4</sup> The celebration also

<sup>1</sup> HAGGAI ERLICH, *Ethiopia and Eritrea During the Scramble for Africa: a Political Biography of Ras Alula, 1875–1897* (East Lansing, Mich. 1982) p. 106.

<sup>2</sup> DANIEL GHEBREKIDAN, “Dogali and Ethiopia’s Continuing Struggle on the Red Sea Coast” in: TADDESSE BEYENE, TADDESSE TAMRAT and RICHARD PANKHURST (eds.), *The Centenary of Dogali. Proceedings of the International Symposium, Addis Ababa-Asmara, January 24–25, 1987* (Addis Abäba 1988) p. 30. This monograph is referred to here and after as TTPDogali.

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 2 above.

<sup>4</sup> MAMMO WEDDENÄH, *Alula abba nägga – tarik qämmäs leb wälläd* [= ...: *An Historical Novel*] (Addis Abäba 1979 of the Year of Grace = 1986/87). The same author, who was a government official in Eritrea for many years, also wrote a couple of other works more or less related to Dogali: “The Life and Works of Alula Abba Nega” in: TTPDo-

gave impetus to further study of the history of the battle and its actors in the subsequent a dozen or so years.<sup>5</sup> A printing press has been named after the battle. Even a “wargame” has been devised and a homepage devoted to it,<sup>6</sup> both in memory of Dogali. The celebration was not restricted to scholars and writers. It was a national jubilation in which the head of state and high party members of the socialist government were personally involved.

The Dogali centennial was no doubt the first victory to be celebrated nationwide. This sudden fascination with and awakening of an almost forgotten victory begs the question for the underlying motive or cause. Dogali was by no means the first Ethiopian victory over external encroachers. Nonetheless, the centennials of Gundat and Gura’e passed unnoticed in 1975 and 1976 respectively. No one seems in fact to have thought about the fourth centennial of Debarwa in 1978.<sup>7</sup> Dogali was by no means greater than any of those successes either.

From the cultural point of view, in fact, centennial celebration is a recent innovation in Ethiopia. Even annual celebrations of secular events were not common in the country prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At least the historical records do not bear witness to such a practice.<sup>8</sup>

It all began with Emperor Menilek’s parade commemorating the seventh anniversary of his victory over the Italians at ‘Adwa. Emperor Haylä Sellase took it over as a national holiday and it has since then been celebrated on the second of March every year. Its pompous centennial took place in Addis Abäba and ‘Adwa in 1996. Yäkkatit 12 (usually known as the Graziani Mas-

gali, pp. 231–52; *Yohannes. Bätarik lay yätämäsärrätä lebwälläd* [= ...: A Novel Based on History] (Addis Abäba, Genbot 1985 Year of Grace = May–June 1993) 340 pages.

<sup>5</sup> The late Ethiopian historian, Täklä Sadeq Mäkwariya, for instance, revised his earlier account of the colonial adventures of Italy in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and made Dogali the hub of his narrative. Cf. TÄKLÄ SADEQ MÄKWARIYA, *Ase Yohannes enna Ityopeya Andennät* [= “Emperor Yohannes and the Unity of Ethiopia”] (Addis Abäba 1983 of the Year of Grace = 1990–91) pp. 321–445.

<sup>6</sup> Ruggero Romano’s Homepage is allegedly prepared by Andrew Preziosi and Andrea Zanini (whose connection with Northeast Africa is unknown to me) under the title “L’Artigliere Stanco”. It deals with the historical background, the battle order, the course of the battle, the uniform of the soldiers, and finally they make a war game out of the story. See <http://www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Zone/3323/dogali.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> The explanation that the country was at the verge of a civil war in the late 1970’s does not justify the scholars’ failure to hold symposia.

<sup>8</sup> The tradition has been that an annual feast-day was set for each saint (but celebrated monthly since the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century) while a deceased relation would be commemorated on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> day as well as on the 6<sup>th</sup> month, 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> year. There have also been some regional variations.

sacre) has also been celebrated annually on the 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> of February. The Liberation Day<sup>9</sup> (May 5) forms the third national secular holiday.

Since the mid-1970s, Dogali had been popularised by eminent scholars of history as an essential component of colonial history.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, there has been no hint for the connexion between these studies and the celebration of 1987. The most plausible explanation for the centennial of Dogali is perhaps to be found in the regime's need to arouse the *esprit de corps* of the society. Disappointed by the revolution's ill success in almost every field, distressed by the harrowing famine that revisited several regions in the mid-1980s and dismayed more than anything else by the ever increasing war in Eritrea and Tegray, the morale of the people, and particularly that of the army, dwindled continuously. The Därg badly needed the morale and psychological enhancement of the people. Ideological propaganda alone proved to be of little help. History was, therefore, called upon to boost the required morale and to arouse patriotism. This was clear from the speech of President Mängestu Haylä Maryam and his comrades.<sup>11</sup> The editors of the proceedings of the centennial conference – three outstanding scholars of Ethiopian studies – also expressed their hope (perhaps not without irony) that the celebration would tickle the country's patriotism which appeared to be at rest:

“The centenary anniversary celebration of the victory of Dogali was observed from January 24–25, 1987 all over the country through several events and observances. ... It can, therefore, be assumed that the message of Dogali has been able to reach millions of compatriots and thus enrich their appreciation of our proud history which is replete with instances of sacrifice and further inculcate a sense of patriotism and strengthen the feeling of Ethiopianness. ... It is hoped that this series of papers may serve to illuminate a crucially important period of Ethiopian history, and that the record of the struggle of a century ago may serve as an inspiration for our own day”.<sup>12</sup>

Evaluating the successes and failures of Dogali as a political instrument in the 20<sup>th</sup> century lies beyond the scope of this article which aims at assessing a particular aspect of the battle. The participants of the 1987 symposium

<sup>9</sup> The Därg moved this date to Mäggabit 28 (= 4/5 April) with the argument that the resistance fighters and allied troops had reached the capital by that date, i.e. a month earlier than the Emperor. The succeeding government restored it to May 5 after 1991.

<sup>10</sup> Three of the major studies are: ZEWEDE GABRE-SELLASSIE, *Yohannes IV of Ethiopia: a Political Biography* (Oxford 1975); SVEN RUBENSON, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence* (London 1976); and, HAGGAI ERLICH, *Ethiopia and Eritrea during the Scramble for Africa: a Political Biography of Ras Alula, 1875–1897* (East Lansing, Mich. 1982).

<sup>11</sup> TTPDogali pp. 11–25.

<sup>12</sup> TTPDogali pp. 5–7.

discussed the events that led to the conflict, the states and personalities that played crucial roles, and the historical context within which Dogali could be viewed. The repercussion of the battle far beyond the conspicuous players, venue and acts seems, however, to have been overlooked. The present paper attempts to supplement the multifaceted study by reflecting on the seemingly remote, and yet significant, consequences of the victory.<sup>13</sup>

The main colonial contestants in Northeast Africa at this time were France, Great Britain and Italy. One may, therefore, wonder what the Central European Powers had to do with Dogali. The British Labour writer, Leonard Woolf, gives us the clue:

“When Lord Napier sailed away from Annesley Bay, having won a peerage and a pension, Abyssinia was left to the Abyssinians. ... Within twenty years Abyssinia again entered the orbit of European policy.”<sup>14</sup>

Once in this “orbit”, Ethiopia could not but interest more powers than the triads. The come-back was initiated by Dogali, a name which suddenly appeared in the papers published between Rome and Stockholm, and between St. Petersburg and London. It was the concern of not only France, Great Britain and Italy, but also of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey and Russia. By “Central European Powers” I am, however, referring mainly to the German Empire and the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, both of which were so significant in international relations that they had to be reckoned with in almost every major development.

The international policies of the individual European states were, and still are, so intricately interwoven with the policies and interests of others that no historian can ignore the policies of the other states when considering that of a particular one.

In a way, colonialism was also a concerted effort of most of the European governments who met in Berlin in 1884–85 to lay down the principles of their proceeding with their “civilising mission”. Articles 34 and 35 of the General Act of the Conference endorsed that a power that gained a foothold at the African coast had also the right to exert its power and impose its sovereignty over the interior as far as the boundaries of the possessions of another European power.<sup>15</sup> This means that on the one hand Italy, which

<sup>13</sup> The tenor of this article was given in a speech in a seminar entitled “The Battle of Dogali – The First Centennial Celebration” held at the Africa Centre, London, on 24 January 1987 under the auspices of the Ethiopian Community in Great Britain. In a way, therefore, it falls in the same category as the other contributions published in TTPDogali.

<sup>14</sup> LEONARD WOOLF, *Empire and Commerce in Africa* (London c. 1920) p. 151.

<sup>15</sup> For the articles of the treaty, see EDWARD HERTSLET (ed.), *The Map of Africa by Treaty*. Third edition, I–III (London 1909; repr. 1967), II pp. 484f.

had gained foothold at the Red Sea coast during the conference session, had the blessing of the other powers to proceed into the interior, while on the other hand the independent Christian state of Ethiopia with which several of the European states had diplomatic contacts was totally ignored as a sovereign state. None seemed to have thought about the possibility that the expanding power could face a stiff and legitimate resistance. The racial factor was too strong for the development of a different attitude. It was also not at all clear whether they would come to the aid of that particular power if the resistance was too great. Perhaps such a consideration was superfluous in as much as complex alliance arrangements already existed. An important historical significance of Dogali in this context was that it worked as an effective test for the feasibility and durability of this fabric worked out on paper.

On the emotional level, Dogali drummed up all the European sympathies for Italy. After all, Dogali was an insult to the civilising powers and a bad omen for colonial projects. Rubenson remarks that Dogali "... was a far stronger protest than the Italians or British had expected".<sup>16</sup> True enough, but I would go further to say that it was more than all colonial powers and, in fact, all those who believed in the superiority of a particular race had expected. Was it not a common dictum of the contemporary European press that no one on earth could resist the sword of European civilisation?

What they feared and what they hated to hear – namely, self-confidence of the Africans – made itself soon noticeable as a natural consequence of Dogali. Menilek II used the horrors of that battle as a bugbear against intruders. He wrote in 1892 that, "... the Italians would 'be punished in the same way as their brothers at Dogali'",<sup>17</sup> if they continued to meddle in the affairs of his Empire. This was not a mere menace. He translated it into action at 'Adwa only four years later.

The repercussions of Dogali in Italy itself were startling, as a specialist on the period recapitulates it:

"Dogali seriously damaged the prestige of the Italian army and caused great sadness and vengeful emotions in the mother country. The defeat was followed by a governmental crisis and changes in leadership at Mas-sawa. Parliament voted finance for a large scale-punitive expedition, and war in the near future seemed to be inevitable."<sup>18</sup>

Dogali also disturbed the French and the British who were paradoxically involved in the rivalry as well as in the intermediary. But all their diplomatic

<sup>16</sup> RUBENSON, 1976, p. 381.

<sup>17</sup> RUBENSON, 1976, p. 396.

<sup>18</sup> ERLICH, 1982, p. 111.

attempts to create a harmless image of Italy at the court of Yohannes IV were frustrated by the Sovereign's unwavering decision to stand by his general.

The Germans and the Austro-Hungarians watched the developments rather indifferently on the surface; but in actual fact they were somewhat worried, for they sensed that Dogali was likely to interfere with their 5-year-old pact with Italy. Ethiopia as such was of little interest to them, and it was only about a dozen years earlier that they ignored Yohannes' appeal against Egypt. This time, the Sovereign ignored them and did not even try to communicate to them a justification for the action of his general, let alone appeal to them for help. Italy was their ally, but none of them was prepared to help in the field, though both were interested in retaining a Mediterranean state as their friend.

As the Ethiopian resistance became too strong, Italy began to wonder whether the alliance could be of any use to her in this particular struggle. Apparently, the Italian question had a double purpose: firstly, to test whether and how the treaty could be implemented; Italy had had her doubts about this treaty since her occupation of Massawa in 1885. Secondly, she wanted to assess the seriousness of German colonial intentions in Northeast Africa.

To take the less important point first, quite a few people in Germany, and to some extent in Austria, entertained for a considerable time the idea of colonizing Ethiopia or at least some parts of it. As early as the 1830's, a number of German and Austrian travellers visited the country and recommended in their books and articles that Ethiopia should be conquered for a colony. The German nobleman von Katte wrote in 1836–38 that Tegray and other parts of northern Ethiopia could have been rather favourable for German plantation projects which could be acquired either through purchase or conquest; and in the case of the latter, he visualized Massawa as a spring-board.<sup>19</sup>

Some years later, an Austrian nobleman, Eduard von Callot, who had once been to Gondär on a secret mission on behalf of Muhammad Ali of Egypt, expressed his desire for a conquest. "Give me ten thousand men utmost", he wrote, "and I will undertake the responsibility to conquer Abyssinia for Austria and to introduce an administration which, though it has to be semi-military, will indeed make the country flourish and enhance its prosperity in a short time."<sup>20</sup> The political dissensions of the Zämänä Mäsafent and the incessant civil war might have given them an impression of the country's weakness, but the possibility that the notables might unite against

<sup>19</sup> A. VON KATTE, *Reise in Abyssinien* (Stuttgart 1838) p. 146f.

<sup>20</sup> EDUARD FRHR. VON CALLOT, *Der Orient und Europa. Erinnerungen und Reisebilder von Land und Meer* I–X (Leipzig 1854) II pp. 296f. See also MICHAEL ZACH, *Österreich im Sudan 1820 bis 1914 = Beiträge zur Afrikanistik* 24 (Vienna 1985) p. 63.



an external invasion such as that visualized by Callot does not seem to have occurred to anyone. Such was the attitude of the time toward Ethiopia.

Fortunately, nobody attempted to entrust such a responsibility to Callot as on the one hand Austria was keenly interested in trade with Ethiopia and was about this time trying to conclude a treaty of commerce and friendship rather than to attempt to win more nationalities under her rule than those she already had, and on the other hand Callot was a revolutionary who was active in the uprisings of 1848 for which he was sentenced to a 7-year imprisonment. A scholar at the University of Vienna has forwarded a thesis that Callot fell out of favour for, among other reasons, proposing the conquest of Ethiopia and he supports his argument with the fact that Callot's 10-volume work entitled "Europe and the Orient" was banned from Austria and that even today no official library possesses a copy.<sup>21</sup> I, for one, cannot subscribe to this view until further corroboration is made.

The fact is, however, that Austria showed a special interest in the Nile valley where numerous of her subjects were engaged as missionaries, businessmen and diplomats,<sup>22</sup> as well as in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean coasts of Africa where she intended to establish a colony of deportees. In 1857 a senior officer, Wilhelm von Tegethoff, was sent to survey the area for the purpose. He considered Massawa and other places before he finally recommended the island of Socotra.<sup>23</sup> This was probably the last Austrian attempt in this respect.

It was different on the German side. So long as Otto Fürst von Bismarck (1815–98) dominated the German politics, the difference between the wish of the people inspired by the philosophy of the age and the foreign policy of the government dictated by "Realpolitik", as it was known, was very conspicuous. In principle, von Bismarck was not in favour of emigration or the acquisition of colonies abroad. Hence, the colonization of Togo, Namibia and Tanganyika was nothing else but the feat of the businessmen of Hamburg and Bremen. Von Bismarck accepted in 1884 what were to be known as the German colonies in Africa mainly for reasons of political expediency at home. Even then, the so-called burden of financing the colonies had to be borne by the businessmen.

<sup>21</sup> ZACH, 1985, p. 63. See also his article: "Eduard Freiherr von Callots Beschreibung von Gondar". In: *Wiener Ethnohistorische Blätter* 30 (Vienna 1986) pp. 51–66.

<sup>22</sup> E. TONIOLO and R. HILL, *The Opening of the Nile Basin. Writings by Members of the Catholic Mission to Central Africa on the Geography of the Sudan 1842–1881* (London 1974) pp. 49–320.

<sup>23</sup> ZACH, 1985, pp. 140–45.



Nonetheless, there was a continuous agitation, especially from academicians and business people, to raise the German economy to the standard of the British one by colonizing Ethiopia. As Ethiopia successfully demonstrated her capability to defend her independence by crushing a series of Egyptian encroachments organized by Swiss, Austro-Hungarian, Danish and American adventurers, the colonial target changed from Christian highland Ethiopia to the so-called “no man’s land”; namely, the Barka basin, the Red Sea coast and Harar, all of which were also coveted by Italy. Johann Hildebrandt explored these areas in 1872–73;<sup>24</sup> and, the staunch propagator of colonialism, Baron von Müller, surveyed<sup>25</sup> them again in 1880–81 and recommended the conquest of these “herrenlose Länder” [= “ownerless countries”] in his own words. The half German and half Czech explorer, Anton Stecker, also toured and mapped the highlands in the years 1881–83 on behalf of the German African Geographical Society,<sup>26</sup> quite a few of whose members were enthusiastic proponents of colonialism. As Dr. Zewde points out in his book on the period, two German explorers toured Harar in the mid-1880’s, and it was rumoured that German colonial intentions were about to be realized.<sup>27</sup> The Italian Government had, therefore, reason to be somewhat suspicious of the sincerity of their ally when the German government failed to show enthusiasm for the Italian enterprise in the area.

Von Bismarck’s aversion to colonial acquisition in Africa actually remained unaffected by the campaigns of his compatriots. On the contrary, he was desirous to see Russian involvement in Northeast Africa,<sup>28</sup> as well as France being bogged in war with any power in that region. The German and Austro-Hungarian Governments were unhappy with the Italian activities in the Red Sea area for quite a different reason. They were of the opinion that Italy’s impolitic move in Northeast Africa was by no means con-

<sup>24</sup> JOHANN MARIA HILDEBRANDT, “Ausflug in die Nord-Abessinischen Grenzländer im Sommer 1872” in: *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin* 8 (1873) pp. 449–71; and, “Erlebnisse auf einer Reise von Massua in das Gebiet der Afer und nach Aden” in: *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin* 10 (1875) pp. 1–37.

<sup>25</sup> JOHANN FRHR.V. MÜLLER, “Tagebuch meiner Reise durch das Gebiet der Habab und Beni-Amer” in: *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin* 18 (1883) pp. 412–38; “Die Handelsverhältnisse der Somali und Galla Gebiete” in: *Kölnische Zeitung* (Köln 13. Juli 1883); and, “Tagebuch einer Reise durch das Gebiet der Gadabursi-Somali und Noli-Galla nach Harrar” in: *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin* 19 (1884) pp. 104–22.

<sup>26</sup> G.E. FRITZSCHE, “Dr. Anton Steckers Reisen in den Galla-Ländern, 1882. Nach seinen Tagebuchnotizen” in: *Petermanns Geographische Mittheilungen* 37 (1891) pp. 233–41. ZEWEDE, 1975, p. 210. See also H. SCHWARZ, *Die Entwicklung der völkerrechtlichen Beziehungen Äthiopiens zu den Mächten seit 1885* (Breslau 1947) pp. 14, 17, 24.

<sup>28</sup> ZEWEDE, 1975, p. 221.

current with the spirit of their treaty of alliance. Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy signed a secret treaty of alliance in May 1882 which was to be valid for five years. With the exception of a few uncautious remarks of some Italian parliamentarians and the Italian press against Austria, there appeared no sign of discord among the three states before 1885. Pribram, who analysed the treaty writes that: "... chief Italian statesmen kept referring most cordially to the Triple Alliance and its beneficial results for Italy, and promised it their unswerving allegiance." He adds:

"It was the colonial plans of Italy, developed in 1885 in emulation of the Western powers, which first caused serious concern to the two Empires. The military occupation of the Egyptian port of Massowah on the Red Sea, without previous notification to Vienna or Berlin, seemed to the statesmen of Germany and Austria-Hungary not altogether in accord with the provisions of the treaty of the Triple Alliance."<sup>29</sup>

In May 1885, the Austrian Foreign Minister, Graf Gustáv Kálnoky (1832–98), consulted von Bismarck whether they should draw Italy's attention to this matter. Von Bismarck strongly condemned Italy's action, but he insisted that she should be given "... time to reform" herself. Obviously, Graf Kálnoky and von Bismarck had lost confidence in Italian policy at this time. A few months later, both remarked in a joint interview that Italy "... could not be regarded as a significant factor in any possible combination".<sup>30</sup> Von Bismarck warned his Austrian colleague to watch the Italian move carefully and added, "We must see to it that there is no chance of Italy through her pranks involving us – perhaps deliberately – in a conflict with France".<sup>31</sup> Graf Kálnoky then informed his ambassador in Rome:

"In view of developments in the East while the negotiations were in progress, it would have been impossible for us to assume obligations which might have drawn us into war with France. This would have run counter to our interests, without being of any real profit to Italy."<sup>32</sup>

France had, of course, not only an established colony at Djibouti, right in the neighbourhood of the territories claimed by Italy, but also entertained a political scheme over Ethiopia and far beyond it, a scheme which later reached a

<sup>29</sup> A.F. PRIBRAM, *The Secret Treaties of Austria-Hungary 1879–1914*. I: *Texts of the Treaties and Agreements*. II: *Negotiations Leading to the Treaties of the Triple Alliance* (New York 1967) II, p. 45.

<sup>30</sup> PRIBRAM, 1967, II: p. 45.

<sup>31</sup> PRIBRAM, 1967, II, p. 46.

<sup>32</sup> PRIBRAM, 1967, II, p. 73.

climax in the so-called Fashoda Incident. It seemed, therefore, likely that sooner or later a conflict would flare up between Italy and France in North-east as well as in North Africa.

The negotiation referred to in the letter pertained to the renewal of the treaty. Von Bismarck was always apprehensive of France and Russia though he declared loudly that he feared none but God and he ingeniously devised a series of treaties, among which was that of the Triple Alliance, to isolate France and to deter Russian expansion to the Balkans. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was equally interested in the treaty particularly as a security measure against Russian expansion into her Slavic territories. Both were profoundly interested in the prolongation of the treaty. Italy joined them in 1882, having been frustrated by France in her colonial attempts in North Africa; but as Germany and Austria-Hungary were now reluctant to help her in her Ethiopian enterprise, Italy threatened to withdraw her membership. The Italian Foreign Minister, Conte Carlo Felice di Robilant (1826–88), wrote to Austria in mid-1886:

“Italy is tired of this unprofitable alliance, and I feel no desire to facilitate its renewal; for I am convinced that it will always remain unprofitable for us. It is possible, however, that Herr von Bismarck is deceived with regard to me, and has imagined, in his ignorance, that I will feel constrained to follow him at all times and under all circumstances. If he believes this, he is grievously mistaken. It is more than probable that I shall not renew the alliance. I shall wait, however, for the proper moment to come before committing myself. I therefore desire that you, for your part, should avoid any exchange of opinion in the matter of the renewal of the alliance. If the Imperial Chancellor wishes to set on foot negotiations to this end, he must take the initiative and let us know his ideas.”<sup>33</sup>

Before long, however, Italy realized that by quitting the Triple Alliance, she would gain nothing: no tangible help would come from Great Britain; France was a ruthless rival who would exclude Italy from all possible areas; Russia was showing interest in Ethiopia, and in fact it was rumoured, at least according to the German press, that France and Russia were co-operating with Ethiopia against Italy; and last but not least, there was no prospect for Italy of getting a share in the event the territories of the so-called “sick man of Europe” were to be divided among the powers. So she opted for the renewal.

But shortly before the treaty was signed on 20 February 1887, there occurred the shocking disaster of Dogali which forced Italy to repeat her

<sup>33</sup> PRIBRAM, 1967, II: p. 47.

question for the last time whether article IV of the treaty could not be implemented in her favour. The article read:

“In case a Great Power nonsignatory to the present Treaty should threaten the security of the states of one of the High Contracting Parties, and the threatened Party should find itself forced on that account to make war against it, the two others bind themselves to observe towards their Ally a benevolent neutrality. Each of them reserves to itself, in this case, the right to take part in the war, if it should see fit, to make common cause with its Ally.”<sup>34</sup>

That the two allies remained neutral in accordance with the agreement was not doubted by Italy; but she hoped that either of them would “see it fit” to come to her aid, or at least that both would exert diplomatic pressure upon France so as to neutralize or minimize opposition from that nation.

Von Bismarck’s reply was brief and clear. As far as he was concerned, the article was intended against Russia and could by no means be applied to Africa. Austria-Hungary also accepted the same interpretation. Italy on her part threatened that she would not help on the event of a war between Austria-Hungary and Russia. To appease Italy, however, von Bismarck and Graf Kálnoky signed on the same day separate additional treaties with Italy promising the maintenance of status quo in the Orient except for the question of Egypt. On the surface, this meant that the territories of the Ottoman Empire would be preserved intact and, hence, Italy would be free to use all her power in the Red Sea area. But in actual fact, “Orient” was a vague term which was not defined in the treaty until 1891 when the treaty had to be prolonged again. To the disappointment of Italy, the other two signatories understood under this term only the Balkans and, hence, North Africa was left open to rivalry. The two allies nonetheless continued to offer Italy more or less symbolic assistance as means of appeasement: both promised to assist her against French attacks in North, if not in Northeast, Africa. They reduced in their protocols the status of the Ethiopian sovereign first to “His Highness” and then to “The Abyssinian Chief”; they recognized without any reservation her protectorate over Awsa, her protectorate over Ethiopia as assumed under the treaty of Wəṣāle, and her declaration of the colony of Eritrea; and, they worked out a formula in collaboration with Lord Salisbury which would enable Italy to represent Ethiopia in the Anti-Slavery Conference at Brussels. In fact, von Bismarck’s successor, Graf Georg Leo von Caprivi (1831–99), was explicitly in favour of the Italian scheme in Ethiopia, his only worry in this connexion being that Italy might incite

<sup>34</sup> PRIBRAM, 1967, I, p. 67.

Great Britain into a conflict by intervening in the Sudan. The two powers even banned the export of weapons to Ethiopia in accordance with an Italian request shortly before the Campaign of ʿAdwa.

But Italy could by no means be satisfied with a mere diplomatic support of her allies which was not effective enough to deter French intrigues against her colonial attempts in Northeast Africa and was looking for an opportunity to befriend England and to patch her differences with France. After her defeat at ʿAdwa in 1896, she directed her covetise toward Tyrol and the Balkans where she continued to agitate:

“The failure in Ethiopia (1896) of Italy’s first foray into overseas colonialism led to a revival of its patriots’ covetousness of Austro-Hungarian territory, and the Triple Alliance became less and less attractive to Italy’s public opinion as the motives both for peaceful coexistence with Austria-Hungary and for anti-French alliance with Germany were invalidated.”<sup>35</sup>

At the same time, she made overtures to her archenemy, France, with whom she reached an understanding in 1900; and two years later they signed a treaty of friendship. Although the Triple Alliance treaty was renewed in 1902, 1907 and 1912 with Italy still as a member, as far as that country was concerned it was a scrap of paper.

As far as Germany and Austria-Hungary were concerned, Italy after 1896 was nothing more than a shadow ally on whom they could not rely. Once again they were shocked to hear that Italy was going to try her luck in Ethiopia, and they hastened to dissociate themselves from the ominous venture. Only two weeks before the Battle of ʿAdwa, the German Imperial Chancellor, Prince Chlodwig von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst (1819–1901) stated:

“... a naval war between Italy, Russia and France on account of Abyssinia would not constitute *casus foederis* for the Triple Alliance”.<sup>36</sup>

Both recognized Ethiopia as an independent sovereign state and signed treaties of friendship and commerce with a “most favoured nation” clause in 1905.<sup>37</sup> They lifted the ban of firearm export to Ethiopia in 1907 and tried

<sup>35</sup> J.G. ROYDE-SMITH, “World Wars”, in: *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* (Chicago 1979) Macropedia 19, pp. 942–1013, esp. pp. 943f.

<sup>36</sup> J. LEPSIUS, A.M. BARTHOLDY & F. THIME (eds.), *Die große Politik der europäischen Kabinette 1871–1914. Sammlung der Diplomatischen Akten des Auswärtigen Amtes* 1–40 (Berlin 1922–27) 11, p. 229.

<sup>37</sup> For texts of the treaties, see BAIRU TAFLA, *Ethiopia and Germany: Cultural, political and economic relations, 1871–1936* = Äthiopistische Forschungen 5 (Wiesbaden, 1981)

their best through trade and diplomacy to overtake Italian influence in Ethiopia. The rivalry came to a climax when Austria-Hungary sold cannons to Ethiopia in 1913–14, and a row broke out in the Italian Parliament on the allegation that the Austro-Hungarian Honorary Consul, Schwimmer, warned the Ethiopian Government of Italian plans to invade Ethiopia from the north. Italy did not deny her military build-up in Eritrea, but argued that it was meant for the defence of her colony against Ethiopian aggression.

At long last, Italy left the Central Alliance and joined the Entente powers in May 1915 against Germany and Austria-Hungary, because the new allies promised her what her old allies did not; namely, to give her a part of Ethiopia if they won the war. They did win the war, but they had no portion of Ethiopia to dispose of to Italy. In spite of Dogali and ʿAdwa, Italy ventured once again to conquer Ethiopia in 1935, but this time with extraordinarily massive preparations.

By way of concluding this brief dimensional assessment, let me assert that the Battle of Dogali was in essence the first open challenge to European colonialism in Northeast Africa. Its impact in history was twofold: on the international level, it cracked the Triple Alliance which ʿAdwa, the historical culmination of Dogali, subsequently rendered ineffective for good. On the national or regional level, Dogali initiated a campaign for liberty and sovereignty which was to last for decades and in which ʿAdwa and Mayčäw were to stand as landmarks. These landmarks were nonetheless fought deep in the heart of the country, and in this respect Dogali, which took place way out of the effective control of the Empire, is no doubt exemplary.

#### Summary

The victory of Dogali (1887) represents the first successful resistance to European colonialism in Northeast Africa, and as such its historical significance has been immense. For some obscure reason, however, it was neglected in Ethiopian historiography until the last quarter of the 20th century when it was popularized for academic and political purposes. Its impact in history was twofold: on the international level, it cracked the Triple Alliance which ʿAdwa, the historical culmination of Dogali, subsequently rendered ineffective for good. On the national or regional level, Dogali initiated a campaign for liberty and sovereignty which was to last for decades and in which ʿAdwa and Mayčäw were to stand as landmarks. These landmarks were nonetheless fought deep in the heart of the country, and in this respect Dogali, which took place way out of the effective control of the Empire, is no doubt exemplary.

pp. 98–108; and, *Ethiopia and Austria. A History of their Relations* = Äthiopistische Forschungen 35 (Wiesbaden 1994) pp. 366–71.